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AIX-LES-BAINS

SIR ALFRED GARROD

OBSERVATIONS

IN

CLINICAL MEDICINE

AIX-LES-BAINS

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IN
CLINICAL MEDICINE

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AIX-LES-BAINS

THE VALUE OF ITS COURSE
In Rheumatoid Arthritis, Gout,
Rheumatism
AND OTHER DISEASES.

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HAVING for twenty or more years been in the habit of sending patients to Aix-les-Bains, at first few in number, but gradually increasing each year, till within the last twelve years the annual numbers have been very considerable, and having in the majority of instances been enabled to watch the effect of the Aix treatment upon these cases, I feel that I am not only justified, but that it is somewhat incumbent upon me to make known to the profession the results observed, and, as far as my experience enables me, to point out what cases are likely to be most benefited by undergoing the course at this much-frequented spa. Before doing so I shall say a few words

with regard to Aix-les-Bains, pointing out a few of its chief features as far as they bear upon the curative powers of the locality, and also give a short account of its mineral waters and appliances, referring those of my readers who are much interested in the subject of the history, geology, botany, and other details concerning Aix to the many books published by the physicians practising in that place.

Aix-les-Bains is situated at the foot of the Alps, in a valley close to the Lake Bourget, surrounded by mountains, which cause its climate to be equable and mild — Italian, in fact, in character, but liable to become very hot at certain times of the year. The small town stands about 820 feet above the sea level, and 90 feet above the waters of the lake.

Aix-les-Bains is in Savoy, about

twenty minutes from Chambéry, its capital; it is twelve hours from Paris and twenty from London by express trains; and, lastly, it is eight hours from Turin. The facilities for reaching Aix have been much increased the last few years, and I have known a patient leave London at 11 o'clock one morning and finish the first day's treatment at Aix by the same hour the next day.

The knowledge of these facts can be utilised; for example, the equable and warm climate renders Aix a place suitable for patients suffering from diseases of the chest and throat, and also from many joint affections, and it is important that patients subjected in the treatment to a somewhat high temperature, and in which the skin is specially influenced, should not be exposed to the chilling influence of a cold air.

Again, the fact that at certain times of the year the heat at Aix becomes very high renders it desirable that English

patients, not usually fond of great heat, and who are not content to remain indoors during the middle of the day should select particular times for undergoing their course. From my own experience, I consider that the best times are from about the 10th of May to the 10th of June, or from the end of August to the end of September — that is, either an early or a late course. In different years there may always be a difference of a week or so. There are exceptions to be made to this rule; for some patients the temperature cannot be too high, and I quite believe that the treatment is promoted by as much heat as the patient can bear with comfort. The temperature of Aix in the middle of May is much like that of London in a warm July.

The facilities for getting to Aix-les-Bains enable many patients to resort to the course who would otherwise be too weak and too crippled to bear a very fatiguing journey.

Patients are naturally desirous of knowing about the length of time which is necessary to complete the course. Although this must differ in different cases, still from my experience I think we may regard twenty-four days of actual treatment as usually sufficient; circumstances occasionally occurring rendering it advisable to discontinue the course for some days, which necessarily lengthens the time of stay. An important question next arises: is it necessary after the course at Aix to go to a bracing air in some high locality? Doubtless, if convenient, a short residence in some such place is desirable; some of the heights near the Lake of Geneva are often selected; but I have known several instances which have taught me that care is necessary in the selection of these temporary residences, for early in the season the hotels are apt to be cold and damp, not having been inhabited for many months, and injury may thus be caused, undoing

entirely the good effects of the Aix course. It is by no means necessary that patients should remain abroad; seaside in this country or the highlands of Scotland, if the season is proper, will effect all the bracing required.

There are two sources of mineral water from which Aix is supplied : the first called the Sulphur, the second the Alum Spring. The name of the latter is misleading, as the water is devoid of alum, and contains as much sulphur as that of the former. The supply of water from these springs is very large, almost a million gallons in the twenty-four hours. The temperature is about 115° F. It is fairly rich in dissolved sulphuretted hydrogen, but devoid of metallic sulphides. There is also a considerable amount of carbonic acid and nitrogen, dissolved in the water. The solid contents are very small — less than one in two thousand, — and consist chiefly of

sulphates and chlorides of sodium, calcium, and magnesium, together with traces of iodine, bromine, and lithium, with a small quantity of organic matter called *barégine*. The water from these two sources, together with fresh cold water, is used in the various baths, and some is made use of for drinking purposes.

The great feature in the treatment at Aix is the douche bath. The patient sits in the douche chair, the feet are kept warm, and jets of the hot sulphur water are applied to the whole body; this is accompanied with massage, and the men and women engaged in this process are perhaps the most experienced and skilful of any in Europe. The temperature, strength, and duration of the douche vary much in different cases. When the bath is finished, drying is rapidly performed, and the patient is wrapped in flannel and carried back to his bed in the

hotel, where he remains for a time well covered with clothes, so as to keep up a full perspiration.

Besides the douche, there are several other baths—the so-called “Berthollet,” or steam-bath, and the local baths; also sprays and inhalations. Lastly, the large swimming-bath is often employed.

Within a mile of Aix the village of Marlioz, where there is a cold sulphur spring, alkaline in reaction and much stronger than the Aix waters; the temperature is about 60° F. At Marlioz there is a pump-room; also inhalation-rooms, in which the water is atomised; besides which there are bath and douches. The Marlioz waters are often used at Aix for internal exhibition; they are private property, whereas those at Aix belong to the State.

Another water is very frequently administered internally at Aix—namely, Challes water, obtained from a village about twelve miles from Aix, which is

beautifully situated, and has all the most powerful sulphur waters in Europe, containing a large amount of sulphuretted hydrogen, and also alkaline sulphides, besides very notable quantities of iodine and bromine; the natural water is of a low temperature, and it is largely exported to Aix elsewhere.

I have already said that the soothing character of the climate and waters renders Aix a suitable place for the treatment of diseases of the respiratory organs, but I do not propose in this communication to speak further on the subject of these affections, but to dwell chiefly on the therapeutic value of the Aix course on patients suffering from different articular, muscular, skin, and some nerve diseases.

In the first place, we will select three forms of disease — rheumatoid arthritis (rheumatic gout), gout, and true articular rheumatism, the last of which in its

acute form is commonly called rheumatic fever.

It is most essential that we should make a clear diagnosis of these three maladies, for although they may, in some of their stages, very closely resemble each other as far as external appareances are concerned, yet in reality, with the exception that all of them are articular diseases and often attack the same joints, they have nothing in common, and their treatment, both medicinal and dietetic, requires to be very different. The course at Aix, although, often useful in all three diseases, is notably far more valuable in one than in the other two.

Under these circumstances I shall make no apology for devoting a short time to the endeavour to separate these diseases, which in practice are constantly mistaken for each other, an error of diagnosis frequently leading to much and often irreparable mischief.

For this purpose it may be well to

picture to ourselves three cases, one of each disease, and by a careful search into their histories and minute particulars, try to come to a correct estimate of the true character of each.

The first case shall be a young woman or man, say, from twenty to thirty years old, having a distinct swelling of one knee, also, with slight increase of temperature of these parts, but not very acute pain. There is little constitutional disturbance, but distinct debility, possibly more or less anæmia.

The second case shall be a young man possibly woman, of about the same age, with the same amount of joint affection—say, in one foot and ankle and one knee; no great pain, but some tenderness and increased warmth of the implicated parts. In this case also the constitutional disturbance may be slight—in fact, scarcely appreciable; and very little debility may be present.

The third case shall be a young woman

or man, exhibiting the same amount of articular affection, with the same joints implicated; the constitutional disturbance at the time very little, but usually more or less accompanying debility.

How are we to diagnose correctly these three cases which in external appearance resemble each other so closely? They may represent certain stages of diseases which are essentially different from each other in their pathology, and which in other stages could be more readily separated.

Of the three cases above alluded to, the first is one of rheumatoid arthritis (rheumatic gout); the second, one of true gout; the third, one of genuine rheumatism. Let us now look more minutely into these cases.

CASE I.

In the history of the first case we shall probably find that some severe depressing cause has been in operation before the development of disease; the cause may have been either mental or physical; there may have been some well-marked heredity on one or both sides; the disease has probably come on very insidiously. In some cases, however, the invasion may be rapid; it is almost certain to have been progressive; the disease has travelled from joint to joint, but the invasion of a new joint is not accompanied with amelioration of those previously affected. If we inquire, it is not unlikely that we shall find that there is or has been some pain and stiffness of the back of the neck and jaw, not looked upon by the patient as connected with the other symptoms. There is more or less pitting of the swollen parts, but no evidence of cardiac

or kidney disease arising in the course of the joint affection.

As to the question of any connexion between alcohol and rheumatoid arthritis, I can positively say that it occurs not unfrequently in patients, who have never in their lives taken alcohol, and I have seen some instances in which even the parents also had been complete abstainers.

As to the nature of rheumatoid arthritis, I have given elsewhere my opinion to the effect that it results from a peculiar form of mal-nutrition of the different tissues of the joints, accompanied with defective power. There is no evidence to show that the symptoms depend upon presence of any morbid principle in the system. Lastly there is much to show in its etiology and the distribution of the affected joints that it is intimately connected with the nervous system; two papers in the Medico-Chirurgical Transactions of last year go far to prove this.

If in such a case as we have described the blood is examined, no uric acid is found; and if an opportunity occurs of observing the state of the joints, there are no urate deposits seen, which is invariably the case in true gout, but in place of such we find, from the first, evidence of ulceration of the cartilages, which goes on increasing till the whole of this structure is removed, and complete disorganisation of the joints ensues. Very many patients who have during the past few months exhibited little or no more than we have pictured in this our first case have within a year or so become hopelessly crippled and practically bedridden. I feel quite sure that in many such cases an erroneous treatment has much to answer for; errors in diet, errors in medicine, and errors in bath treatment have frequently united in bringing about this lamentable condition.

AIX-LES-BAINS TREATMENT IN RHEUMATOID
ARTHRITIS.

It is in the treatment of cases belonging to this class of maladies that the course at Aix-les-Bains is peculiarly successful, not only in ameliorating at the time the condition of the patient but in removing the tendency to the disease from the system.

The effect of the Aix waters is by no means confined to the period of their administration, but the improvement often continues for several months ; and now and then a patient, who may be disappointed at the termination of the course, after a short time has full reason to feel satisfied. I have seen numerous cases of rheumatoid arthritis most signally benefited by the treatment, and no relapse has occurred after several years.

To effect this amelioration in cases of rheumatoid arthritis several influences are at work : first, that of the hot sulphur mineral douche; secondly, the massage accompanying the douche; thirdly, the internal exhibition of the sulphur water, whether it be the Aix water or that from Marlioz or Challes.

These, together with the climatic influence, produce an effect on the system which is most valuable. My own experience leads me to think the Aix course, if properly pursued, is not debilitating, or, if a feeling of relaxation is produced at first, it is by no means, permanent. I have been frequently asked why Turkish baths should not prove equally as beneficial as the Aix treatment in cases of rhumatoid arthritis. My own experience enables me to say with confidence that, however useful they may be in other forms of articular disease, in this special affection their use is certainly not indicated, but strongly to be con-

demned, and I have seen in many cases much injury done by them ; in one case — that of a young woman, to whom they were cruelly exhibited for thirteen weeks and often twice in the day — hopeless crippling was induced, and almost every joint in the body became completely ankylosed, so that she could neither stand nor sit in a chair without being propped up with pillows. Patients and their friends are apt to be deceived by the fact that when taking the Turkish bath, and even for a short time afterwards, the pains are often relieved, but no permanent benefit is obtained ; the subsequent mischief is in proportion to the debility induced.

I do not wish for a moment to be supposed to consider the Aix course as a certain cure ; there are many cases in which the nutrition of the body is so hopelessly undermined that no treatment has a chance of proving effectual, either in removing the symptoms or checking

the progress of the disease; and, moreover, we must not trust to mineral water alone, for I am confident that medicinal and dietetic treatment, continued over a lengthened time, is most essential. We must not lose sight of the fact that rheumatoid arthritis is essentially a slow but progressive disease, and a few week's treatment cannot be relied on to produce a permanent cure; of this, however, we may feel sure, that everything which improves the general state of health has at the same time a tendency to lessen the disease.

CASE 2.

We will now investigate our second case, that of the young man suffering from a slight attack of true gout. We shall find a history very different from that of the first case. There is a great probability that he will have inherited

gout from his parents or grandparents, on one or other side, as he has been attacked with the disease so early in life; and there is an equal probability that he has indulged somewhat freely in those alcoholic fluids which cause gout. We shall also find that he had several previous attacks, the first most likely confined to the ball of the great toe; that the disease is periodic, but not continuous, as in the case of rheumatoid arthritis; there need not have been any case of rheumatoid arthritis; there need not have been any previous depressing causes in operation, but eczema, cramps, and dyspepsia may have preceded and accompanied the articular affection. In such cases we do not find cardiac affection as part of the disease, but in those of mature years valvular affection may be present as a result of the long-continued use, or rather abuse, of alcohol, and there is a great tendency to kidney disease. An

examination of the blood in such a case reveals the presence of much uric acid, and evidence of the deposit of urate of soda is often seen on the helix of the ears and elsewhere ; and if at any time an opportunity is afforded of an examination of the joints, streaks and patches of urate of soda are seen on the surface of the cartilages and ligaments.

AIX-LES-BAINS TREATMENT IN GOUT.

When the disease is any way recent or acute, the Aix treatment should be avoided ; for if the local inflammation were checked by the douches and massage it is sure to be developed in some other part ; for there is always a morbid state of the blood in gout, different from what exists in rheumatoid arthritis, and the morbid elements must be eliminated somehow or other. Hence mischief, rather than good, may ensue from the

Aix treatment, which has no very great power of freeing the blood — at any rate, not in sthenic states of the system. The case is different in asthenic and chronic forms of gout; in these there is usually a defective power of the nervous system and a weakened state of the circulation. When there are passive or indolent swellings of previously inflamed parts; when there is much eczema; when there is a threatening of kidney disease in which a free action of the skin proves of much service; when massage is indicated — then in all such cases the value of the Aix course is great and undoubted, and it often lengthens considerably the interval between the attacks of gout.

CASE 3.

The examination of the third case will readily reveal the nature of disease under which the patient is suffering. In all probability there have been one or more previous and acute attacks of long duration; that many joints have been implicated; and that in these attacks there has been much febrile disturbance and excessive perspiration. Not unlikely there has been pericarditis or endocarditis, which has left its marks. We shall also find that cold has been the immediate cause of the illnesses, favoured by a previously weakened condition of the body; that the disease has not been continuously progressive, but that there have been intervals of good health, if the heart has not been a cause of trouble. The blood in such a case exhibits no evidence of the presence of uric acid,

perhaps it may be less alkaline than in health; and if an opportunity occurs of examining the joints, although we may find evidence remaining of more or less inflammatory action, there are no deposits on the cartilages or ligaments of urate of soda as in gout, and no evidence of ulceration of the cartilages as in rheumatoid arthritis. This third case is one of a subacute form of true rheumatism, which is so frequently met with in the intervals of the acute attacks of this disease.

VALUE OF THE AIX COURSE IN ARTICULAR RHEUMATISM.

No one would think of submitting a patient to the Aix treatment in articular rheumatism if there is any amount of febrile disturbance lingering about, or if any recent cardiac disease is present; and, as a rule, the joints after even an

acute attack are not left in a very disabled condition. I once saw a comparatively young woman who had experienced twelve attacks of acute rheumatism ; yet after recovery from the last attack she exhibited no very detectable articular changes, except a certain amount of relaxation of the joints. The Aix treatment therefore is not often required in such cases, but should any stiffness remain it would doubtless be of value. The question I am frequently asked is, whether after recovery from an acute attack a course at Aix would have any influence in preventing the return of the disease? I am not able to speak very confidently on this point from clinical experience, and one must see on reflection that the difficulty of arriving at a correct conclusion must be very great ; still this much may be said, that the Aix course acts as a general alterative to the body at large, and certainly has a beneficial effect on the nervous system,

improves to general health, and has therefore in all probability a protecting influence against recurrences. Some physicians have asserted that valvular murmurs often disappear; this subject, however, requires more clinical study before it can be looked upon as established.

MUSCULAR RHEUMATISM, SCIATICA, AND OTHER NEURALGIC AFFECTIONS.

In chronic muscular stiffness there can be no doubt of the benefit frequently derived from the hot sulphur douche, and often from the massage; and the effect of these appliances is increased by the drinking of some sulphurous waters, in the same way as we have seen them benefited by the long-continued use of small doses of sulphur. Neuralgic affections, as of the sciatic nerve, and also of different branches of the brachial plexus

of nerves, when they have become chronic, also receive much benefit from the Aix course.

CUTANEOUS AFFECTIONS : PSORIASIS,
ECZEMA, ETC.

The skin affections which I have for the most part seen treated at Aix have been those in connexion with rheumatoid arthritis and gout. I have usually seen psoriasis associated with rheumatoid arthritis, and eczema with true gout. In regard to the occurrence of psoriasis in rheumatoid arthritis, I am sure that the Aix treatment, in relieving the articular, usually ameliorates and often cures the skin affection. I cannot help quoting here a case illustrating this statement which came under my care some years ago. An elderly man, a high dignitary of the Church, had for many years suffered from psoriasis over

much of the body, and on the back was a patch larger than any I had before seen, covering the whole surface of that region; he had more recently developed joint symptoms, evidently of rheumatoid arthritis. Although somewhat old for mineral water treatment, still he was suffering so much that I sent him to Aix chiefly for the purpose of arresting the somewhat rapid increase of the articular disease. After about a month's treatment he had improved in general health, but had not made much progress as far as the skin was concerned; but during the next eight months after leaving Aix the skin disease rapidly improved, and the back became quite free, and, in fact, the amelioration effected both in joint and skin appeared quite marvellous. I have observed in numerous instances that the eczema occurring in gouty patients becomes much relieved by an Aix course, but in some few cases I have been disappointed.

As I have already exceeded the prescribed length of this communication, I must refrain from speaking more in detail of the different diseases which might be beneficially treated at Aix, and shall confine myself to a few final remarks as to my general opinion, after an extended clinical experience, of the value of the course at Aix-les-Bains.

1. Reviewing the results in the very numerous cases sent by me during the last twenty or more years, I am strongly of opinion that more benefit has been derived from the treatment at Aix than would have been received at any one other spa I am yet acquainted with.


2. That in many diseases of the stomach, liver, bladder, &c., the value of several other courses would often exceed that of Aix-les-Bains.

3. That in rheumatoid arthritis (the rheumatic gout of old writers) the value

of the Aix-les-Bains course far exceeds, according to my experience, that of any other known spa.

4. That in many other articular affections, such as gout and rheumatism, the Aix course is very valuable, but not to the same extent as in true rheumatoid arthritis; and that an equal benefit may often be received from some other mineral water treatment.





A AIX-LES-BAINS
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